

RECIPROCITY

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"MAISIE might be labeled 'Essence of Ontario, Limited,'" declared her sister. "Her tastes and her speech are perfectly good Canadian. She prefers hot tea to iced tea, toast to beaten biscuit, and a field of buckwheat to a cotton-patch. As soon as I get back to South Carolina, I'm going to tell mother how her own child talks about 'putting down peaches.'"

Maisie's husband, Frank Battersby, looked frankly bewildered.

"Don't you put down fruit in the States, Polly?"

"We put *up* our preserves. Maisie has been putting up peaches all her life, and she is deliberately expatriating her tongue when she says anything else!"

Steven Compton laughed, less wholeheartedly than he usually did at Polly's absurd exaggerations. In fact, his interest in that young woman was getting to be no laughing matter to him.

He had first met her when she came to visit her sister, some two months before. Mrs. Battersby had decided that the baby must have a change from the city, and Steven had suggested the pretty village on Lake Erie, where his mother lived. That dear lady had been gratified when her son's usual vacation visit of a week had stretched itself to three, and when he had twice run down for Sundays afterward. After Mrs. Battersby and Polly had returned to town, he had seen Polly daily.

There was something different about Miss Trenholm, he explained to himself. One could never predicate her, and it was an interesting phase of girlhood to meet. She had the most contradictory little face, with serious hazel eyes, a delicate childish mouth, and the sauciest nose in the world! She looked up at you with an expression so wistful and wishful and sadly sweet that a

chap had an insane desire to take her in his arms and comfort her about it. Then a smile rippled over her face, transforming it as a shaft of sunlight transforms moving water; and one was conscious of the dimple in her cheek, the impudence of her nose, and the determined tilt of her chin. A man never knew where to find her, or whether he was going to find her at all. She had her moods of withdrawal.

Steven recalled uneasily a confidence of Battersby's:

"I tell you, Steve, the longer a man is married to one of these South Carolina women, the less he knows about her, and the more in love he is!"

As they rose from the luncheon-table, Maisie said:

"Don't take too long to explain reciprocity to Polly, please. I think you're quite brave to undertake it, Steve. We're going to the exhibition later, you know, but Frank has to go to the bank for a short while."

From the half-open library door, Steven could see Mrs. Battersby saying good-by to her husband a moment or so later. It must be very heart-warming and flattering to have a woman put her soft cheek against yours, and cuddle up to you as if she could never let you go, when you have been married five years, and are withdrawing your presence for only an hour.

"Please don't look at Maisie with patronizing approval when she is making a goose of herself over Frank!" commanded Polly.

At her accurate reading of his thoughts he colored sharply in the boyish way he had—a way that annoyed him unspeakably.

"Now tell me all about reciprocity," she requested. "I won't be leaving Canada until after the election next week, and I do hope and trust that reciprocity will be car-

ried, so that I can take my new furs and mother's Sheffield tray across the border without bothering about customs!"

When Steven explained that neither her furs nor her Sheffield tray would come under the provisions of the treaty, she was justly indignant.

"Then I am absolutely against reciprocity," she declared. "It's like most legislation—made by a lot of men just to please themselves, without considering any way in which women could be benefited by it. They'll arrange to send a million sheep across the border before they'll let a girl bring one lynx muff. It's picayune politics!" she ended gloriously. She remembered hearing Major Trenholm use the phrase in regard to some local measure, and she thought it most impressive.

Steven beamed with surprise and pleasure. He was a Tory to the bone, of a long line of English Conservatives, and the treaty was such an offense to his mind that he had carefully avoided any mention of it to the charming and somewhat inflammable Miss Trenholm.

"Do explain all about it," ordered Polly prettily, nestling in a leather chair several sizes too big for her.

He adjusted the pillows for her, and his hand accidentally touched hers. The tingling that ran through his veins was delicious, but alarming. He did not want his heart to get in the saddle and gallop away with his judgment. Law and golf had hitherto proved sufficiently absorbing.

"If Mr. Balfour was a Canadian, which side would he take?" asked Polly.

"He would be with us, presumably, as he is a Conservative."

"I adore him!" Polly remarked enthusiastically. "I think he is the nicest person in politics I ever saw. We were in England the summer I was sixteen, and we happened to have tickets to the ladies' gallery in the House of Commons on such a dramatic afternoon. Redmond and Will Crooks and Winston Churchill and everybody else jumped on Mr. Balfour because he wouldn't resign. You know how it is in our country—when one politician abuses another, he says the man's grandfather stole sheep and he himself takes bribes and is the tool of trusts and should be sent to the penitentiary, if he doesn't get hanged as he really deserves. So I was entirely unprepared for the courtesy of the English. Mr. Churchill accused Mr. Balfour of

'personal magnetism'! You would have thought that Mr. Balfour would have thanked him for the compliment and presented him with the gardenia in his buttonhole; but to the contrary, he repudiated the charge of magnetism in the most charming and satirical manner. I never heard such vowels on a human tongue. I'd rather pronounce the letter 'u' as he does than sing like a skylark!"

Steven readjusted Polly's pillows. They didn't need it, but he had to give some vent to his feelings. It was delightful to find Polly so level-headed on these matters which had muddled many eminent minds.

He began to explain the evils of reciprocity. He commenced with the days when Canada, weak and struggling, asked for and was refused the treaty which would then have meant so much to her. He reviewed her tremendous difficulty in gaining the great artery of the Canadian Pacific for the development of her Western dominion. He described her magnificent resources, scarcely touched as yet. He dwelt upon boundary disputes; and as he became more earnest, recounting incidents and explaining their significance, it did not occur to him that Polly had not once spoken.

"Further connection between us and the States is certainly experimental, and may prove disastrous," he said. "We should strengthen the bond between us and the mother country." Only a Polly could have applied this impersonal sentence to an attractive English girl whose name had occasionally been connected with Steven's. "We don't want to get too near Uncle Sam. He makes an excellent neighbor, with the fence between, but we don't want to take him into partnership. It would weaken the natural tie with England, and we should gain a Yankee tradesman in the place of Britannia. There is an influx of all nations into the States, and the mixture of races makes a mongrel breed."

Steven became aware that Polly had risen, that her slender figure was drawn to its full height, that her hazel eyes looked black, and that her little white teeth were pressed hard into her under lip. He had a momentary sensation that she was going to box his ears.

"If you have quite finished calling me a yellow cur, I will ask your permission to leave."

A cold douche could not have amazed him more.

"You!" he gasped. "I was speaking of the Yankee characteristics."

"May I remind you that my brother is an officer in the United States army, and my mother's only brother a member of the United States Senate?"

"But you said—"

Polly closed the door behind her.

A proper indignation swept over Steven. The girl was inconsistent to the point of sheer absurdity. Why, on the lake, one day in July, when he had teasingly called her a "little Yankee," she had turned on him so sharply that she nearly upset the boat. She had assured him that she was a Southerner, and that alone. She had talked of the war as if it were a matter of yesterday, and had made the burning of her grandmother's home in Columbia so vivid that the flames actually scorched him!

She was proving that a foolish consistency was no hobgoblin to the South Carolina mind, and the ashes of Columbia were quite cold.

Steven insisted to himself that he had wasted a great deal of time and given a great deal of thought to a perfectly unreasonable girl. It was well that this had happened when it did, to show them the basic difference in their natures. He would leave before Frank Battersby returned.

He stooped to pick up a handkerchief which Polly had let fall. She had been playing with Maisie Battersby's little girl before luncheon. He recalled the movement of her hands as she held the handkerchief before the little girl's eyes, and how she had stooped to kiss the downy yellow hair. The memory hurt sharply, like physical pain.

"I won't run away!" he determined doggedly. "I have an engagement to take Miss Trenholm to the exhibition, and she can break it and make her own explanations to her sister."

II

WHEN Battersby returned, Maisie came down-stairs, expecting to find Polly in the library.

"Has Polly gone to get her coat, Steve? I'll call her."

Polly came in as if nothing had happened, with her most detached manner, and wearing her most becoming hat. There was no other danger-signal visible.

Compton was non-talkative, as he usually was when angry, while Miss Trenholm

chatted in the courteous, *dégagé* manner she would use to a stranger.

"Polly is furious with Steve about something," murmured Maisie to her husband. "Whenever the child talks with a coo in her voice, I know she's mad. They probably fussed over politics. Do say something to them!"

Frank called out obediently:

"Where shall we go first, Steve?"

"Would you care for the dog-show, Miss Trenholm?" asked Steven.

"If mongrels are permitted to go among pedigreed Canadian dogs," she assented sweetly.

Angrier than he ever remembered being, Steven turned into the poultry exhibit. It looked as if the guinea-hen were having another afternoon at home, to judge by the rococo roosters on all sides. Queer creatures some of the fowls looked, with heavily feathered legs, bizarre plumage, or enormous wattles. Polly chatted lightly as they wedged their way through the crowd.

"Do see that old hen with the queer, straight tuft on her head! She looks as if she is saying, 'I can't do a thing with my hair after I've washed it!' What did you say, Frank? Do I like buff cochins? No, I prefer the Plymouth Rock. There's something so fine and strong and stable, so lasting and American and homelike, about the Plymouth Rock!"

When they were outside the building again Maisie said to Steven:

"Have you and Polly been quarreling over Winston Churchill? She adores him."

Steven looked amazed at this latest revelation of a maid's two minds.

"I understood that she admired Mr. Balfour," he answered stiffly.

"So I do," cooed Polly. "But the reason I like Mr. Churchill is still deeper. In his speech that day he said that he had recently been reading 'The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym,' and he kept using the word 'trance' with the broadest English 'a.' But at the end of his speech, when he became tremendously excited, and flung out his defiance to Mr. Balfour, he said that 'England had awakened from her trance.' No 'trahnce'—it was a good, nasal trance, inherited from his American ancestors—right through his nose and perfectly *stunning!*"

Steven Compton felt limp. How could a man understand a woman who adored Balfour's 'u's' and Churchill's 'a's' for exactly the opposite reason?

He turned to Mrs. Battersby, and said, more challengingly than he was aware, as if to gain some light on these matters:

"Who are your political favorites, Mrs. Battersby?"

"Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson," she returned instantly.

"They—they represent different parties," he stammered.

"Yes? But I admire Mr. Roosevelt because he is so beautifully tender toward children; and Mr. Wilson because there is something about his brow that reminds me of Frank."

Compton gave it up. A flash of gratitude from Polly's eyes to Maisie's made him feel that the latter was taking Polly's part against him. Certainly these Carolina women were subtle beyond masculine comprehension!

"Maisie and I are going to look at the cats—we want to choose a Maltese kitten for the baby," said Frank. "We'll join you later in the Horticultural Building."

Steven and Polly walked toward it in silence. Now that the others were gone, she gave up the effort to talk as if nothing had happened. Steven, looking at her with the tail of his eye, saw that all the delicate, rose-petal color had gone from her cheeks, and that shadows, as of pain or fatigue, were penciled under her eyes. A swift compunction, a sudden contradictory joy, swept over him.

He recalled for the hundredth time his fairest memory of Polly—of a day when she was standing in a meadow near his mother's home, with chicory blossoming about her, and her hands filled with a great bunch of the flowers.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she had whispered, as if words might break the spell. "Look at these flowers—little blue stars fallen from daytime skies! And the white butterflies hover over them like cloud-petals."

"I—I had thought of them as weeds," he had said awkwardly.

"Weeds?" she reproached. "I don't believe there are any weeds in Canada—just bright blossoming everywhere!"

In her white dress, with her radiant, uplifted face, and the absent smile touching her lips, he had thought she was the loveliest girl he had ever seen; but suddenly, and very gravely, he realized that this girl was dearer still—this obstinate, hurt little girl, with a line of pain at her lips, because of him.

In the Horticultural Building, Polly stopped in front of a florist's exhibit. There was an extensive display of pansies, bedded in moss.

"I wish to look at these," she said. "Mother grows them, and I may find some new varieties."

She tried to keep her voice cool and even, but it quivered in spite of her. As she looked down at the friendly wee purple faces, which suggested the old garden at her home, she felt the stinging moisture in her eyes, and she dared not look up.

Two men whom Steven knew passed by, touched their hats, and smiled broadly. He noticed that even strangers were grinning sympathetically. Steven could not understand, and his annoyance deepened. Then he heard Frank Battersby's voice, good-naturedly amused, and he saw Maisie's bewildered smile.

All at once it rushed over him that Polly and himself were standing in front of a huge bridal bouquet, whose trailing, beflowered streamers barely touched the bed of pansies beneath. The white orchids and gardenias spun before his eyes, and he blushed to the roots of his hair.

Glancing up, Polly saw the bridal bouquet and the splendid guilt of Steven's blush; but he saw only the little twinkle of her tear.

They turned away in confusion. Opposite the florist's exhibit was a wonderful display of peaches and apples from British Columbia. The crowd was all around them. Steven could not tell her of the love, the tenderness, the contrition at having wounded her, which surcharged his heart. He could only murmur:

"Oh, Polly, will you ever put *up* peaches for me?"

Conservative as he was, he could not have made an ampler apology than the Americanism.

"I shall love to put them *down* for you, Steven," she replied, so low that only a love-taught ear could have distinguished the capitulating preposition.

Frank and Maisie had elbowed their way through the crowd to join them.

"Well, is reciprocity quite clear to you two now?" quizzed Frank.

Polly answered swiftly:

"It's perfectly easy to understand, after all. It means each one doing what the other one wishes, and being perfectly happy about it!"